



Poll-time censorship

The gag order obtained by a Bengaluru Lok Sabha candidate defies freedom of speech

The Bengaluru civil court's blanket order restraining 49 newspapers, television channels and other media outlets from publishing anything 'defamatory' about Tejasvi Surya, the BJP's candidate for the Bengaluru South Lok Sabha constituency, is contrary to the law and the Constitution. The temporary injunction violates the basic principle in free speech law that bars 'prior restraint' or pre-censorship of any publication, including the media. As recently as in 2017, a Supreme Court Bench made it clear that pre-broadcast or pre-publication regulation of content was not in the court's domain. In *R. Rajagopal* (1994), the court noted that there is no law that authorises prior restraint. The existence of a *prima facie* case is a precondition for an interim injunction, and a restraining order may be obtained only if some material deemed defamatory has been published, and when further publication ought to be prevented. Arraying print and electronic media outlets that had not previously disseminated anything defamatory about an individual fails this test, rendering any injunctions obtained against them illegal. Judge Dinesh Hegde's order takes note of two factors in granting Mr. Surya's request for an injunction: that some allegations against him surfaced after he filed his nomination papers, and "some defamatory messages" against him "are in transit" in the media. He cites a 1986 Karnataka High Court decision, but misses the point that the High Court's justification for an injunction concerned an individual who had made public utterances about the plaintiff, and it was not an omnibus order against a class of persons. In any case, there is enough case law from the Supreme Court to bar prior restraint orders.

The allegations that have aggrieved Mr. Surya seem to originate in an individual's opinion on him on Twitter. It is possible that this piece of information was or is likely to be used against him by his electoral rivals. However, this cannot be a reason for a public figure – and a candidate of a major political party, even a debutant, is definitely one – to claim a right to gag the entire media from writing about him. Even if the argument is that the order only prevents 'defamatory' content and not responsible reporting or criticism, that doesn't justify a judicial gag order, as it may be used to prevent the media from writing anything adverse to his campaign. It may also prevent defendants in a future proceeding from using 'publication of the truth in the public interest' as a defence. Requests for omnibus restraining orders against media outlets seem to find favour with some civil judges in Karnataka. This newspaper itself faces in Karnataka around a hundred petitions for injunction filed by individuals and entities, most of them unlikely to be mentioned in its columns ever. The Karnataka High Court or the Supreme Court must examine this trend and strike down such blanket gag orders.

Turkish surprise

The ruling party's losses in local polls are a personal setback for President Erdoğan

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had led the campaign for Sunday's municipal elections from the front, so the reverses to his Justice and Development Party (AKP) have come as a personal jolt. The biggest blow to the Islamist party is the end of its long dominance of the capital Ankara and possibly Istanbul too. These polls were the first since Mr. Erdoğan was re-elected in June 2018, after Turkey switched to a presidential form of government authorised in a 2017 referendum. The Republican People's Party (CHP), the principal Opposition, and pro-Kurdish parties have made huge inroads. They had managed to contain the AKP's margin of victory in the June presidential and parliamentary polls. Given how much he had raised the stakes, the question is whether he will reconsider recent policies that have done little to restore investor confidence in the economy following the lira's spectacular depreciation last year. Prices of food commodities in particular have remained high. But even as farmers and traders reeled under high fuel and fertilizer costs and unfavourable weather conditions, a government hamstrung by the ballooning deficit could do no more than turn its ire on them. It accused traders of hoarding stocks and spiking costs. In addition, local governments forced retailers to hold down prices. The move put a further squeeze on the sector and hurt the government's electoral fortunes. A beleaguered Mr. Erdoğan unleashed the rhetoric of food "terrorism", but was unable to deflect attention from the need for a fiscal stimulus. Stiffer fiscal targets set by the Finance Minister, who is Mr. Erdoğan's son-in-law, have foreclosed any conventional avenues to contain the price escalation.

The travails are symptomatic of the conditions afflicting Turkey. They go back to the run on the currencies of several emerging economies, leading to the depreciation of the lira by a third. Ankara's woes turned acute following the flow of hot money and large borrowings by businesses in external currencies. Mr. Erdoğan is opposed to higher interest rates, and the government's response to halt the lira's slide and contain inflation was belated. Conversely, lending rates in Turkey now are among the world's highest, which makes lowering them quickly a risky proposition. The challenges are compounded by strained relations with its traditional allies, particularly the U.S. Washington has announced a halt to supplies related to the F-35 jets, in retaliation for Ankara's decision to buy a Russian missile defence system. The diplomatic standoff over the detention of a U.S. pastor too was a factor behind the weakening of the lira last year. As the next elections are a few years away, expectations are that Mr. Erdoğan will adopt a more pragmatic approach to address the economic challenges.

The many and different faces of terror

It is premature to read the Islamic State's defeat as the start of a more peaceful phase



M.K. NARAYANAN

Terrorism is a well-recognised form of asymmetric warfare, and has been around for centuries. Some terror strikes tend to resonate more than others, for reasons that are inexplicable. The Munich Olympics massacre in 1972, the 9/11 terror attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001, and the November 26, 2008 terror attack on multiple targets in Mumbai are, for instance, more deeply etched in the memories of people than many other terror events. It is important, however, not to take an episodic view of terrorism, since history is relevant to a proper understanding of the threat posed by terrorism.

Since the 1980s

Radical Islamist extremism has been the dominant terror narrative, post the 1980s. This was possibly an offshoot of the decade-long Afghan war (1979-1989), which let loose an avalanche of 'mercenaries' who had honed their skills during the Afghan Jihad, and employed violence indiscriminately. Over time, terrorist outfits seemed to gain greater transnational reach, and were no longer fettered to geographical locations. New organisations, such as al-Qaeda and its acolytes, as also the Islamic State (IS), gained pre-eminence among a growing multitude of terror groups. Regional variants such as Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, the Pakistan-sponsored Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) in South Asia, and the Boko Haram in Africa were no less deadly.

More recently, especially in the West, a new narrative has been un-

folding. Sporting different labels, extreme right-wing elements are proving to be no less violent and dangerous than jihadi terrorist groups. They appear, at present, less organised than many outfits, and the violence they perpetrate seems more random. Their targets, which included, for instance, a Jewish synagogue (in the U.S.), political personalities such as President Emmanuel Macron of France and Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of Spain, members of immigrant communities and minority groups (in Europe) are, nevertheless, carefully chosen. Many do appear to be lone wolves such as the Norwegian Anders Breivik (2011) and the Australian man responsible for the March 15, 2019 Christchurch massacre, in which 50 people were killed. Non-denominational terror, loosely described as right-wing terror, has in the process become as threatening as jihadi terror. Clearly, the topographical anatomy of terrorism does not change, even if motivations differ.

The evolution of terrorism in the 21st century, and the constant shifting tactics of terror groups, does make terrorism look like an 'existential threat'. This would, however, be too far fetched. What does need to be recognised is that the terror threat is rapidly transcending from what we see happening, to what we can imagine might happen.

New breed of terrorists

Take, for instance, the year 2016 in India. Pakistani terror outfits randomly carried out daring attacks on the Pathankot Air Force base, an Army brigade headquarters in Uri, and an Army base in Nagrota. In February this year, the JeM carried out its most audacious attack to date, targeting a Central Reserve Police Force convoy, in which 40 personnel were killed, the highest casualty figure for security forces personnel in Jammu



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and Kashmir. The use of a suicide bomber, driving a vehicle containing a few hundred kilograms of explosives to strike a high-profile target, represents a new pinnacle in terrorist violence. It is representative of the newer breed of terrorists, as also the transmutation in the nature of terror.

Globally, spectacular jihadi attacks may be fewer, but attacks are on the increase. In January this year, Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, with links to the IS, killed 20 people attending a church service in Sulu province. In the U.K., on New Year's Eve (2018-19), three people were stabbed at a Manchester train station by an IS supporter. In March this year, explosives were found at transport hubs in and around London, and also at the University of Glasgow, leading to a major terror scare in the U.K. Also in March, the Netherlands witnessed a terror attack in Utrecht, when a jihadi suspect indiscriminately shot at commuters in a city tram.

Meanwhile, terrorists are further honing their skills, and are able to strike at targets at will. Cross-pollination of concepts and ideas among terror groups, and in many cases even pooling of resources, has made this possible. A decade of violence in Iraq and Syria has produced a reservoir of battle-hardened fighters, who are bolstering the capabilities of disparate terror groups in different parts of the world. As in the 1980s, we are seeing a majority of those who took part in the violence in Syria and Iraq currently adding to the cadres

of existing terror groups in Asia, Europe and Africa.

It would, hence, be premature to celebrate the decline of terrorism, based on the so-called demise of the IS. The territory controlled by the IS Caliphate may have shrunk dramatically compared to 2014, but its obituary cannot be written just yet. The IS remains a fount of support and inspiration for several hundreds of fighters across Asia, Africa and Europe. Many IS networks are still operating clandestinely. Many of their dispersed supporters are ready to revive their activities once the pressure relaxes. There are unconfirmed reports already that the IS has directed several of its recruits to return to their country of origin and strengthen the nucleus of IS groups there. The estimate is that anything up to 20% of those who were part of the IS bandwagon in Syria and Iraq have returned to their homelands. As the IS declines in Syria and Iraq, other IS entities such as the Islamic State of Khorasan (which includes parts of India) will be the beneficiaries.

Caliphate as an idea

The Caliphate is an idea which is still relevant. The Internet remains its main vehicle for radicalising Muslim youth. What is most likely is that the IS will make a shift to guerrilla warfare tactics. It is likely to strengthen its 'Emni' (intelligence and security branch) to carry out reconnaissance before launching attacks. The lone wolf syndrome will be pursued with renewed vigour. Already, there are some indications of this. In December 2018, a lone IS gunman killed five people in Strasbourg (France); in January 2019, a suicide bomber at a restaurant in Manbij (Syria) killed 19, including four Americans. More such attacks could occur.

Al-Qaeda, the other leading jihadi outfit, is separately engaged in enlarging its global network.

Violence by al-Qaeda affiliates might have been overshadowed by the IS more recently, but al-Qaeda affiliates in Africa, such as the Boko Haram, have not been far behind. Al-Qaeda affiliates in East and South Africa, the Sahel and Yemen are the largest and most feared terrorist groups in their regions. Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) is said to be exploiting alleged incidents of violence against Muslims in the subcontinent to strengthen itself.

Al-Qaeda affiliate LeT (based in Pakistan) represents the main terror threat to India, along with the JeM. The rest of Pakistan's network of terror reads like an alphabet soup, viz. HUKI (Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami), the (Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) and HM (Hizbul Mujahideen). Pakistan is also reportedly training outfits to carry out underwater operations.

Developments in technology, information and doctrine will in all likelihood alter the character of 21st century terrorism. In the Pulwama attack, the suicide bomber is reported to have used a 'virtual SIM' to contact his JeM handlers in Pakistan. It is difficult at this point to determine which of the disruptive technologies will turn out to be the most dangerous.

Guided by controllers

The concept of 'enabled terror' or 'remote control terror', viz, violence conceived and guided by controllers thousands of miles away, is no longer mere fiction. Internet-enabled terrorism, and resort to remote plotting, will grow as the 21st century advances. Counter-terrorism experts will need to lay stress on multi-domain operations and information technologies, and undertake 'terror gaming' to wrestle with an uncertain future that is already upon us.

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

How to achieve 24x7 power for all

Three steps to help rural India overcome electricity poverty and reap immense socio-economic benefits



ABHISHEK JAIN

Almost every willing household in India now has a legitimate electricity connection. The household electrification scheme, Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, or Saubhagya, has been implemented at an unprecedented pace. More than 45,000 households were electrified every day over the last 18 months. Against such an achievement, it is important to ask these questions: what did it take for India to achieve this target? Why is electricity access not only about provision of connections? And, how can we ensure 24x7 power for all?

The efforts under Saubhagya have come upon decades of hard work preceding it. The enactment of the Electricity Act, in 2003, and the introduction of the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana, in 2005, expanded electrification infrastructure to most villages in the following decade. But the rollout of the Saubhagya scheme, in 2017, gave the required impetus to electrify each willing household in the country.

However, over the last year, several engineers and managing directors in electricity distribution companies (discoms), their contractors, State- and Central-level bureaucrats, and possibly energy ministers have been working at fever pitch. Discom engineers have evolved in their attitude, as we saw during our on-ground research – from one of scepticism to that of determination. Their efforts to meet targets even included crossing streams in Bihar on foot with electricity poles, and reaching far-flung areas in Manipur, through Myanmar, to electrify remote habitations with solar home systems.

Beyond connections

Despite such massive efforts, the battle against electricity poverty is far from won. The erection of electricity poles and an extension of wires do not necessarily mean uninterrupted power flow to households. By tracking more than 9,000 rural households, since 2015, across six major States (Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal), the Access to Clean Cooking Energy and Electricity Survey of States (ACCESS) report by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), has highlighted the gap between a connection and reliable power supply. While the median hours of supply in-



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creased from 12 hours in 2015 to 16 hours a day in 2018, it is still far from the goal of 24x7. Similarly, while instances of low voltage and voltage surges have reduced in the last three years, about a quarter of rural households still report low voltage issues for at least five days in a month.

Vital steps forward

In order to achieve 24x7 power for all, we need to focus on three frontiers. First, India needs real-time monitoring of supply at the end-user level. We achieve what we measure. While the government is bringing all feeders in the country online, we currently have no provision to monitor supply as experienced by households. Only such granular monitoring can help track the evolving reality of electricity supply on the ground and guide discoms to act in areas with sub-optimal performance. Eventually, smart meters (that the government plans to roll out) should help enable such monitoring. Ho-

wever, in the interim, we could rely on interactive voice response systems (IVRS) and SMS-based reporting by end-users.

Second, discoms need to focus on improving the quality of supply as well as maintenance services. Adequate demand estimation and respective power procurement will go a long way in reducing load shedding. Moreover, about half the rural population across the six States reported at least two days of 24-hour-long unpredictable blackouts in a month. Such incidents are indicative of poor maintenance, as opposed to intentional load-shedding. Discoms need to identify novel cost-effective approaches to maintain infrastructure in these far-flung areas. Some States have already taken a lead in this. Odisha has outsourced infrastructure maintenance in some of its rural areas to franchisees, while Maharashtra has introduced village-level coordinators to address local-level challenges. Such context-based solutions should emerge in other States as well.

Finally, the improvement in supply should be complemented with a significant improvement in customer service, which includes billing, metering and collection. Around 27% of the electrified rural households in the six States were not paying anything for their electricity. Despite the subsidies, constant loss of revenue would make

it unviable for discoms to continue servicing these households in the long run. Low consumer density along with difficult accessibility mean that conventional approaches involving meter readers and payment collection centres will be unviable for many rural areas. We need radically innovative approaches such as the proposed prepaid smart meters and last-mile rural franchisees to improve customer service and revenue collection. Rural renewable energy enterprises could especially be interesting contenders for such franchisees, considering the social capital they already possess in parts of rural India.

Electricity is the driver for India's development. As we focus on granular monitoring, high-quality supply, better customer service and greater revenue realisation at the household level, we also need to prioritise electricity access for livelihoods and community services such as education and health care. Only such a comprehensive effort will ensure that rural India reaps the socio-economic benefits of electricity.

Abhishek Jain is Senior Programme Lead at the CEEW, a policy research think tank. ACCESS was conducted in association with the Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation, National University of Singapore and Initiative for Sustainable Energy Policy

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

More Benches

It is indeed a good suggestion to have Benches of the Supreme Court in other places of the country to ensure better access to justice (Editorial page, "Ensuring justice to people", April 2). To start with, it would be advisable to have at least one Bench of the Supreme Court in the south. Article 130 provides for it. In fact when this suggestion was put across to the then Chief Justice of India, who hailed from Tamil Nadu, was not encouraging. It only shows that powerful lobbies of lawyers and other interests will not allow a circuit bench of the Supreme Court because there is a lot of money in this profession in the capital, Delhi. If there is a way out of this, it has to be done by the Supreme Court itself. Unfortunately,

there are hurdles in the form of interests, making speaking in one voice difficult. It makes one wonder whether ours is really a socialist Constitution or a Constitution working on capitalist lines.

N.G.R. PRASAD,
RAM SIDDHARTH,
Chennai

■ There are many underlying issues that need to be addressed if justice is to be made accessible in a better way; these issues are hefty fees charged by the lawyers to present a matter and the huge court fee, to name two. Unfortunately, lawyers are no exception when it comes to monetary issues. This is manifested in the manner in which some lawyers entrusted with state briefs handle matters. Self-realisation is the first step

towards change. The Supreme Court has an ideal opportunity to brainstorm on this. In this connection, former judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, sitting judges and academic luminaries can be a part of the process.

SHEBA RIVY SIMON,
Melukara, Kozhicherry, Kerala

Campaign slogan

The acerbic and hostile tone and tenor of the article (OpEd page, "Chowkidars are those who protect the rich", April 2) have robbed it of even a pretence of moderation and balance. The trivialisation of the chowkidar metaphor, as a defender of the wealthy classes, seems too naive and simplistic. Should we ban chowkidars, maids and drivers merely because they serve the rich? What about the neighbourhood

watchman, whose reconnaissance at night keeps a vigil over a number of houses including those of the poor? What about the armed guards who protect the so-called VIPs? Are not these gun-wielding security personnel glorified chowkidars employed by the state and that too at the taxpayers' expense?

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

Waste treatment

I refer to two reports published in the daily – "Only 26% of rural toilets use twin-leach pits, finds survey" (March 18) and "Septic tanks meet norms: Ministry" (March 19). Septage treatment poses a significant challenge in rural India, where toilets with septic tanks are the most popular type. Generally, faecal sludge is dumped in open spaces

and water bodies, often surreptitiously, which is a grave health hazard. The Rural Development Organisation, an NGO that has been working in the Nilgiris since 1980, has put up three faecal sludge treatment plants. The compost from here is blended with kitchen waste compost. About two tonnes of co-compost is produced every day. The process of co-composting and testing done here, which meets FAO and BIS standards, is the first of its kind in India. This is

tested at a laboratory in Chennai every month before being distributed to farmers at a subsidised price.

Another project being done and successfully implemented in the Nilgiris is a grey water treatment plant. Here, household waste water is collected, recycled with appropriate rural technology, tested and reused in irrigation. It is of help during the dry seasons.

N.K. PERUMAL,
ARUNKOTTAI, The Nilgiris

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A photograph carried in the graphic titled "Constituency Profile - Dharmapuri" (Election 2019 page, some editions, April 2, 2019) was not that of the DMK candidate Senthil Kumar.

A Sports page snippet (April 1, 2019) erroneously said that Birstow and Warner became the second set of batsmen to score centuries in an IPL innings after Kohli (109) and de Villiers (129 not out) (RCB vs Gujarat Lions) in *Rajkot* in 2016. The match was held in Bengaluru.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in